

The Only Example

by Me

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Tess, Monica, and Andrew surveyed the peaceful town. Invisible, being angels, they could soak in the solitude that was so rapidly disappearing in the world. "Seems like this would be the ideal place for someone to live; certainly not one of our toughest jobs," Andrew commented. Just then, a boy flyng a kite managed to get it caught in a tree. As it turned out, the child tried too hard to get it out, and wrapped himself around the kite string until it, the tree, and him were a hopelessly tangled web. "Unless it's to teach him how to fly a kite," commented Monica. "His name is Charlie Brown," Tess explained. "And he...shhh," she requested as another kid came up to him. "He certainly has some...interesting talents," commented Monica. Tess shushed her as Charlie's friend Linus spoke. "Your new friend Vince will enjoy seeing this one. It may be one of your greatest works of art yet - 'what a tangled web we weave, when we fly kites against a tree.'" "Very funny," Charlie Brown commented, though inside appreciating the humor. "Charlie Brown has a very close circle of good friends and family whose love lets him feel safe accepting put-downs, even putting himself down." Tess considered that Lucy, Linus' sister, went overboard sometimes, but even she wasn't too bad, for her age. "Who's Vince - is this the mission?" Monica inquired. Tess nodded and sighed. Before explaining Vince's problems - the abuse, the five foster homes in six years, and so on - the child in question walked up to Charlie Brown and Linus. "Good one; boy, that kite-eating tree really got you this time," he noted. Linus turned toward Vince. "See, the rain falls on the just and the unjust." "Oh, great," came Charlie Brown, "now it's going to start raining while I'm out here." Vince, seeming downcast a moment before, managed a grin. "I never thought trees could turn on you." As a couple other neighborhood kids gathered around the comical sight, the younger ones stifling laughs, Charlie Brown stated matter of factly "I would appreciate someone heping me out of this, if you don't mind." Linus and Vince did so, the former making a comment about Jesus washing his

disciples' feet. "Yeah, but did they fly kites in those days?" Linus shrugged. The three boys gazed at the remains of the kite until Lucy hollered for her brother to come home so they could get ready for dinner. The angels could feel a fondness for Charlie Brown coming from Vince's heart. "He's glad he's not the only one who bad things happen to," Tess explained. "So, what's the problem," Andrew inquired. Tess lowered her head as the boys talked. Snoopy walked past in a WW I fighter pilot's uniform. "This is Vince's fifth foster family, he's come from a few homes with a cycle of abuse, and he's basically presuming the world has nothing good in it." Monica glanced over and pointed out Snoopy. "That is the strangest dog I've ever seen," agreed Tess. "Anyway, God keeps trying to help, but..." "He won't trust anyone," guessed Andrew. "And don't think other angels haven't tried." Monica smiled. "He's never had a friend like Charlie Brown, though, I bet." "You catch on fast sometimes, Angel Girl," came Tess' pet name for Monica. "And that may be your best approach, but..." "I knew there was a catch." "With all those fallen angels running loose, isn't there always? Charlie Brown thinks of himself as a loser - though as I say, it doesn't effect his psyche because of his circle of friends, and he does like to keep trying." Tess didn't want to rush Monica, but felt she should warn her there might not be much time. "This is an emergency family Vince is with, so you might not have much time to work here." That evening, with the sun just ready to go down, the angels noticed Lucy holding a ball for Charlie Brown. "Come on, run up to the ball and kick it," she pleaded with him. "I'll give you something if you do it." Charlie Brown sighed. "I've never kicked it before, maybe this time I'll be surprised." He ran at full speed, but just before he went to kick the ball, Lucy yanked it away from him, and he went flying onto his back. "I keep my promises, Charlie Brown," Lucy noted. "Now I'll give you a compliment. You're a great sport." "Talk about your hollow compliments," came Andrew. "But he is," claimed Monica. "He doesn't complain or fight back, he just lets others use him. Maybe a little too much, but I sense some of the Lord's work in him." Tess agreed. "I want you two to go to their church tomorrow night, they have an AWANA program Charlie Brown, Linus, Lucy, and Sally Brown attend." "Will Vince be there," Monica inquired. "Have you suggested Charlie Brown invite him yet?" Monica and Andrew went into sighted mode and walked down the street, holding hands. They appeared to Charlie Brown at that time. "I hope you're okay," shouted Monica as Lucy and Charlie Brown stood there, the boy slowly getting up. "Oh, of course, nothing hurt but my pride." Though my dad might be out for a week with a bad back if he did that, he told himself. "I'm Monica Smith, and this is my husband Andrew." He waved at the kids. "We saw your dad at church Sunday; we're here visiting a friend for a few days." Both, of course, were true - but not the way Charlie Brown or Lucy expected. "Great guy, huh," Charlie Brown commented, trying to give a phony name since these were not known people to him. "My name is...uh, Mephibosheth." Lucy rolled her eyes. The angels laughed. "I know your name's really Cahrlie Brown, and your friend there is Lucy - but I admire how you keep your name from strangers." "Yeah, but who'd believe this blockhead," complained Lucy. "Mephibosheth, indeed, nobody's named their kid that for thousands of years." Linus, happening upon the scene, disagreed. "Given the odd names now going around, I wouldn't be surprised if someone did name their child that." Monica made a note to ask Tess why the child still carried a blanket. Lucy sneered. "You would name a kid that. Well, what do I expect from a brother who carries a blanket around. Good grief." Monica named the church the children went to, and asked if they would be bringing any visitors to AWANA. "We love that program, it's such a

blessing for the youngsters." Lucy pointed to Linus. "Yeah, it keeps him out of my hair 'cause he's memorizing the whole Bible, I think." Andrew laughed. "Oh, yeah, we heard, Mr. Fowler said there was one kid who went through so many memory verses, they were so desperate to find him verses, he would joke he was going to start asking you for verses in Latvian." All laughed this time. These people must be legit, thought all; how else could they know the leader's name, the church, even the language he'd used in that joke. Charlie Brown thought a moment. "I hadn't considered anyone, really; I only really know a few kids real well." "What about that Vince, does he go there, I don't think I saw him Sunday," came Andrew. Charlie Brown fidgeted a little, stammering that he didn't want to bother with it. However, with a little prodding from Linus, and encouragement from Monica, he agreed to call Vince right away. She almost went too far speaking of the positive influence Charlie Brown could have on his life. "Careful, Miss Wings," spoke an invisible Tess, you don't want to scare him away from helping." As usual at the small church, there were hardly enough AWANA workers. Monica and Andrew told the youth pastor they'd worked before with the program, though, and agreed to help the children with memory verses. Vince felt ill at ease viewing all the kids in fancy AWANA uniforms; it felt like he was the only new person there. It didn't help matters that Linus had been reciting...it sounded like he'd done the whole first chapter of the Book of John before they began. And Lucy - well, she just had a mouth that, sadly, reminded him of his mother. Of course, Lucy couldn't be expected to be perfectly lady-like, but Vince had rarely seen any parents who acted like anything approaching adults. This Charlie Brown was different, though. He was nice, and yet was the opposite of the perfection of Linus. Vince participated little that night, something the others took for shyness. But, listening to Charlie Brown stumble over the simplest verse - Monica was trying to help him remember John 3:16 from the previous year - made Vince feel better. Charlie Brown couldn't seem to keep any words straight. Monica, clad in an AWANA blouse, felt something inside, apparently telling her it was important that Charlie Brown know this verse by heart. As Vince's attention drifted elsewhere, Monica asked Charlie Brown to say it once more. "For God so loved the Son, he gave this world everlasting life, that none should perish..." That's not it, he told himself. Monica smiled, announcing she was pleased at the attempt. "You know, Charlie, it seems like you're trying too hard." "What do you mean?" "You want to measure up to Linus' standards, which is great. But, God may not have created you to be Linus," noted the angel. "Yeah, I know. But, I gotta be somebody," he emphasized. "I've got to be good at something." It sure isn't kite flying or baseball, he told himself. Monica shrugged. "You might not find what that is for a while. But you should be able to explain to others what it means, and then maybe the words will come to you better." She considered some examples from his own life. She used the things she'd seen. "When you fly a kite, it usually goes into a tree, right?" Charlie Brown tried to count on his hands the kites he'd lost. "I've lost eight since June," came the deadpanned remark. Monica planned to stifle a laugh, then decided to allow a little chuckle. "See, you're good at delivering a punch line without laughing. Now, what would I say if I suggested you give the tree a kite on purpose." "I tried that once." Monica always loved kids - she loved all souls, but the innocence and pure faith of most children constantly reminded her why she loved the Lord, the Light, so much. For such is the Kingdom of God, she told herself. "We all try many things on our own, and they don't work, do they." He nodded. "But, God did something He knew would work, because He created everything. What do you think of when you think of God?"

"Love," came the immediate reply. "Right, 'God so loved.' All one must do is receive that love. It was given to who - who was Jesus given to?" "Well...everyone." "Right, that's what the world means. God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, came and died for our sins." Charlie Brown nodded. "Then He rose again the third day. If one doesn't put their faith in Jesus, what happens." "They die." "And what's a word for die - perish, right?" "For God so love dthe world, He gave His only begotten Son...." Monica smiled. "And if you believe in Him, what will happen?" "You get to live forever in Heaven." "Right, which means you hve..." He said the right words. "Okay, let's put it together." After several minutes, the verse seemed to have stuck in Charlie Brown's head. A couple days later, Andrew stood invisibly near Vince. "I can't believe he's feeling this depressed - I've seen adults like this, but never kids." Monica agreed. "I know, it's sad, but the family he's placed with tomorrow might be better." But he's right, thought Monica, this emergency family may have been his only good one so far. Luckily, Charlie Brown was walking over to Vince, and chose to sit down beside the boy, who held his head in his hands. "What's wrong," Charlie Brown asked. "I'm going to another family, in a totally different county." He sighed. "You know, you were my best friend, Charlie Brown." Tess groaned. She'd worried about Monica putting too much pressure on Charlie Brown, but now Vince was doing it. "Better talk to Charlie Brown - he's speechless," counselled Tess. Monica bent down and whispered in Charlie Brown's ear "tell him about God." "Well..." Charlie Brown stuttered before blurting out "God loves you." "How do you know?" came the morose looking child. The angels recalled Tess' comment that other angels had tried working with Vince. Probably they appeared as angels, too, they considered. Monica and Andrew appeared and walked up behind Charlie Brown and Vince. Charlie Brown explained. "You see, .." He tried hard not to stammer. Come on, don't choke, he told himself. Monica, knowing Charlie Brown was tense, whispered unseen. "Tell him how much God loves him" She and Andrew then wakl around and made as if they were just now walking up to the youths. "GodsolovedtheworldHegaveHisonlybegottenSon," blurted Charlie Brown, sighing afterword. Can't I get this out right for once? Vince kept his head on his chin but looked up, startled that Charlie Brown had gone from being unable to speak to sounding like an auctioneer. "What I mean is, God loves you. He is love." "Then why do these bad things happen to me." Vince frowned. "Yeah, I know, they happen to you, but all your bad luck is bad kite flying and lousy baseball games. And, you have good things happen, too. I never have good things happen to me" Sensing Charlie Brown didn't know what to say, Monica smiled. "You do; the best thing ever happened to you." Only then did Charlie Brown agree. Vince tried to recall the events of his life, and found them too chaotic, too painful. "What in the world was that?" "God loves you, and showed it by sending Jesus for you." Charlie Brown kept stating that God loved Vince because he really didn't know what else to say. But, something had planted that in his heart. "God loves you." Monica decided she needed to intervene. "He loves you so much that He died on the cross for you. And you know what?" "What?" His head hadn't left his chin the whole time. Monica glanced at Tess, concerned over what to do. She appeared as clueless as Charlie Brown about how to proceed. Tess grinned knowingly. "Tell Charlie Brown to explain faith." "But haven't other angels tried?" "Yes, but he needs a person," Tess explained. Monica and Andrew finally sat, this time far enough away as to not startle them. It appeared to Charlie Brown that he'd just not noticed them. That wouldn't be unusual. "I heard you're going to a new home, Vince," came Anrdew's calm voice. "Yeah, and nothing about how nice it'll be to have something new, I've heard

enough of that," moaned Vince. "I can tell you're very upset," Monica remarked. "Did your friend tell you about God's love for you?" Vince shrugged. "He said somethin' about what He did for me, but I've never seen it. Nothin' I can recall ever went right for me." "It's hard to believe sometimes," agreed Monica. "I'm sure Charlie Brown can tell you about that, with all those kites he's lost." All but Vince snickered. Vince merely grinned. Charlie Brown elaborated. "Yeah, whenever I get a kite I always figure there's hope, even though I'm pretty sure the tree will eat it I keep flying it." "That's wonderful that you have such faith. Why is that," Monica inquired, hoping this would help Charlie Brown explain faith a little better. "Because even though I usually lose them, I figure if I didn't try, I couldn't get anywhere. Our baseball team always loses something like 42-0, but I keep going out to the mound, because..." He thought a minute. "Because I know that no matter how bad things go, this life won't last forever. It drives me crazy, sometimes I think nobody cares, but God will still love me. I have His promise of a home where there is no pain, no suffering, no tears..." He grinned dreamily. "And God can never lie, because he's perfect," finished Monica. "Sounds like a great place, doesn't it, Vince." "Yeah, easy for him to say, he's got friends, family..." Charlie Brown reasoned with him. "But you see, He is a friend that you can keep. If you trust in Jesus to forgive you for your sins, He will be with you alwyas. For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son..." The verse suddenly came to him. "That whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." I didn't say that myself, that's for sure, he thought to himself, putting an arm on Vince's shoulder. "See, I'm what you call a loser because things I try - kicking the football, flying kites, playing baseball - don't work out. But I am more than a winner when it comes to God, through Jesus Christ. And you can win right now. For if you believe in Him, you will have everlasting life." Vince finally looked up. "For real?" "Yes, I know. That's what keeps me going, it's not what's on the outside, our friends and family. It's what's on the inside - having Jesus in your heart - that counts." Monica and Andrew smiled and walked away as Vince prayed to receive Jesus as his Savior, satisfied that the boy had things well in hand. Several minutes later, someone from Human Services came to pick up Vince, with the boy looking happier than he'd ever been. Monica felt incredibly sad as she considered the continued confusion that may like in Vince's future. "How can a child survive, having been through all that?" "I don't know, but you know what? You did your job magnificently," Tess remarked. "But he might never wind up in a good situation," sighed the angel. Tess put an arm around Monica. "But you see, even if he never had friends or family he can trust in, you helped him commit his life to God's Christ, and gain His forgiveness. And one day, he'll be in Heaven, and he'll see Charlie Brown there." She began to weep tears of joy herself. "And he'll say 'thank you, Charlie Brown. You're the reason I'm here. You are the only example of Christ I ever saw. Thank you for taking the time to show me about this place where there is no pain, no suffering, and God will wipe away every tear.'"

End
file.